STATE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Battle Creek, Birmingham, Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Kalamazo

Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Birmingham, Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing & Saginaw Valley

March 16, 2016

The Honorable Judy Emmons, Committee Chair Senate Families, Seniors and Human Services Committee

Re: HB 5107 – Human Trafficking Notification Act

Dear Madame Chair and distinguished members of the Committee,

My name is Julie Schnell, and I am the Chairwoman of the State Public Affairs Committee for the Michigan State Council of Junior Leagues. I thank you for the opportunity to write today, and I ask for your support of HB 5107.

The Michigan State Council of Junior Leagues (MSC) is comprised of representatives from each of the nine Junior Leagues in the state whose members advocate on behalf of women and children in the areas of human trafficking and foster care. MSC has received national recognition for its efforts in combatting human trafficking. In May 2011, the United Nations Association of New York honored the Junior League (specifically those Leagues from statewide initiatives in New York, New Jersey and Michigan, as well as more localized efforts by individual Leagues) for its League-based initiatives in fighting against human trafficking. More recently, Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette has partnered with MSC, holding a series of town hall events around the state to educate the community about human trafficking and steps that ordinary citizens can take to get involved in their own communities.

Representative Kurt Heise recently reintroduced HB 5107, which is before your committee. If enacted, HB 5107 would require posting of a notice that includes the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline (1-888-373-7888) and BeFree Textline (233733) in strategic locations in Michigan where victims and potential tipsters are most likely to see it. The hotline and textline provides a bridge to help for victims of human trafficking, an outlet for tipsters, and vital resources for the public, law enforcement, and first responders.

As many of you are aware, Michigan is a major international shipping hub, with I-94 and 131 linking Ohio and Michigan to Chicago and Canada. Our major cities are attractive to tourists and major sporting and international events. While all of this is wonderful for jobs and economic development, it also comes with a human price — it makes Michigan a target for human trafficking.

The Michigan Junior Leagues recognize the importance and efficacy of reaching those who are currently enslaved with access to services and support. For example, the Junior League of Birmingham has partnered with SOAP, Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution. The groups distribute bars of soap bearing stickers with the NHTRC hotline number and information about victim support services to hotels and motels in advance of the Detroit Auto Show. Often the only time a victim is alone is when they are in the bathroom, so the stamped bars of soap offer an important lifeline to reach out with help. Through HB 5107, posting the hotline and textline numbers provides the additional ability to reach and save more victims of human trafficking.

HB 5107 would require the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) to provide an example notice available on the LARA website that is ready for the affected entities to download, print, and post it where it is easily visible to customers and visitors. HB 5107 is narrowly tailored to take into account the practical side of running a small business for those affected entities that are required to post the notice, and there would be no serious financial impact, because it would be available for no charge on the LARA website.

In working to eradicate human trafficking, the NHTRC hotline and textline must become more widely available and visible. For these reasons, I ask for your support of HB 5107. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Schnell State Public Affairs Committee Chairwoman Michigan State Council of Junior Leagues